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ABSTRACT

This booklet presents brief, detailed guidelines intended to aid school administrators in developing and managing a publicity program for schools. Primary emphasis of the discussion is on generating publicity and media exposure; only cursory attention is devoted to the other facets of a complete public relations program. Major topics of discussion include planning and developing a publicity program, preparing newsletters and press releases, planning press conferences and preparing press kits, and maintaining a good working relationship with the news media. In addition, the final section presents 74 story ideas for generating publicity about school events, personnel, and programs. (JG)

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The School Administrator's PUBLICITY HANDBOOK

EA 007 984

ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS SEPT., 1973 VOL. 1, NO. 5

The School Administrator's

Publicity Handbook

WITH 74 STORY IDEAS IN

HANDY CHECKOFF FORMAT

INTERNAL & EXTERNAL PR

for Maximum Media Exposure

AND AN ORDERLY SYSTEM FOR SETTING UP THE PROGRAM

Truth Power

"Truth never yet fell dead in the streets; it has such affinity with the soul of man, the seed however broadcast will catch somewhere and produce its hundredfold." -- THEODORE PARKER (1810-1860)

$4.00

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Introduction

PR MASTERY, NOT MYSTIQUE

You won't find any Public Relations "Mystique" in these pages. No complicated charts, diagrams or verbiage designed to perpetuate tired myths about communications. No shibboleths which set publicity apart from any other vital function of the modern management man.

No, this publication is designed to set the communicator free.

Pointing out a likely course.

With a system of reminders and memory joggers.

But stressing freedom and creativity as the basic, simple hallmarks of fast, effective communications.

An Explosion:

COMMUNICATIONS

IN THE SEVENTIES --

WHERE WE'RE AT

So here we are.

Management at all levels is caught up in the crush of new demands for information -- technical, economic, political and social. The media explosion, triggered by electronic TV, has turned the managerial world topsy-turvy. Like it or no, administrators are in the communications business -- and as individuals, as well as members of the educational community, they must succeed. Or else.

There must be a better understanding of communications facilities. A more responsive awareness to attitudinal changes. Better knowledge of management's public. An awareness that information -- and those who control information -- will dominate the forseeable future.

Information is becoming a major resource -- able to control physical resources of every kind.

And there's a complicating factor down at the grassroots:

Despite the public's insatiable demand for more information, the public has totally reversed its focus on news events and human events. Not too long ago, the public got its most important news from City Hall and the County Courthouse via the local newspaper; today, a crisis in the Middle East, an Asian confrontation or a hijack over Maryland dominates the news coverage. Events far afield are more quickly, more totally understood than, say, an important industrial zoning just down the road or the urgent need for a new school building to replace an unsafe and costly one.

And if that news didn't happen today, just a few hours ago, it's dead. Buried. Forgotten. Because there's always a new news-making crisis blooming somewhere, on a far horizon.

That's why the regional and local administrator (communicator) can't fall back on the rusty, dusty days of old in communicating his needs, successes and failures. He must move fast. His copy must be fresh. And only through its humanism, its emphasis on people -- student, teacher, staffer -- and proper stress on involvement can the purely local story bloom and prosper.

Local news is still good news. It can be made to work. It takes planning and imagination.

Example: A maintenance man in a San Francisco Bay Area School District recently resigned after many years' service. He was very candid about his pleasure at giving up the broom with which he'd swept so many hallways. His story wasn't confined to the usual one paragraph item back near the classifieds: He was shown in a graphic photo, posed alongside a trash receptacle, breaking the broom over his knee. There was no difficulty at all, getting that graphic action picture on the front page of the newspaper.

Planning. Imagination. Thoroughness.
Simplicity, directness and humanism throughout.
That's what this little publicity booklet is all about.

PUBLICITY

Step by Step

Audience

No public relations program is more effective than its mailing list -- or total audience exposure.

Please re-read the above. It's vital to the success of your PR effort. It's a good idea before you make the administrative decisions regarding format (s), delegating responsibility, providing necessary facilities (a desk, chair, typewriter and telephone are the basic components of highly-effective publicity operations) to consider news distribution.

A good starting point is your staff and all other personnel concerned. That can make up list I.

But that's just the beginning.

The Association of California School Administrators is vitally interested in what you're doing and will profit by what you have to say. The County Superintendent of Schools will take special delight in hearing from you regularly, and most likely will quote your materials in his own county educational bulletin, multiplying your total audience without cost to you. Remember to send copies to key members of other staffs. List II.

There are always certain city and county officials who'll be vitally interested in your district's progress and in your profession's ideas on contemporary matters. Don't overlook zoners, planners and research personnel in this category. List III.

Who really are the VIPs, the decision makers in your community? This will take thought. A janitor at the theatre may be head of an important union or influential in a large church group. Major taxpayers have their fountainheads of influence. Ethnic group leadership operates in similar fashion as do the economic interests. A staff person can produce an astonishing collection of VIPs merely by asking a dozen knowledgeable people who THEY think the opinion makers are. List IV.

The media -- press, radio and TV. List V. (See "Media Listings," page).

Friends of education -- PTAs, suppliers, active parents. List VI.

The cross-fertilizers, meaning other educational groupings who are exposed to the same media, the same contacts as yourself. No administration can exist in a vacuum these days. Keep your neighbors posted. List VII.

And so on. (In some instances, a home address is better than the office listing. Let your conscience be your guide.)

In any event, by organizing your distribution list into categories somewhat similar to those suggested here, you can direct the mailing of any particular item to all -- or PART -- of your contacts. It beats having everything scrambled together.

OBJECTIVES

In a few sentences, state the goals of your publicity program. How can PR best serve the public, your profession and your district? Certainly, you won't need more than a paragraph.

This will be your credo.

It can cover a year's operations. Or ninety days. Whatever.

At THAT point, you can revise it. Meanwhile, stick to the script.

PROGRAM CONTENT

The best publicity program can't long conceal the banal and the trite. So, at the outset, hypo the public relations activity with stimulating content. Some ideas:

1. Establish criteria for publication(s) and press releases, placing highest priority on news value and significance. Prescribe a realistic frequency for issuance of publication(s) and news releases -- be regular.

2. Deftly influence all educational meetings along the lines of news importance and information importance. Import speakers when possible. Export speakers as often as you can.

3. Utilize your state association (ACSA) resources.

4. Call upon state and national groups, community resource people and your own consultant experts for added spice and bite.

5. Glamour professions such as jet pilots, mathematicians with new ideas, surgeons, writers can literally carry your educational program into the news columns and win radio and TV exposure. Lace them into your PR program.

6. Make brevity and punch your trademark.

7. If available, assign a staff member who believes in involvement processes to prepare listings of practical and immediate ways to involve the maximum number of people in the maximum number of activities.

EVALUATE -- DON'T SPECULATE

Not as an irregular activity, or as make-busy work, but as a scheduled, formal activity evaluate the impact of your program. A friendly news editor or public relations professional would be willing to sit in on this -- if you really want to get down to the nitty-gritty.

INTERNAL EMPHASIS

Internal communications, when creatively handled, provide the logical springboard for the overall outside public relations effort. If the internal image is favorable, it will make its way outward. Internal communications represents the "steak." In external communications, you sell the "sizzle." Internally, it's vital that authority and authenticity be emphasized. Involvement of the very best educational thinkers within and without the district will lend credence to everything you do. And in times of crisis, expertness is a highly reliable support to fall back on. Again, your professional association(s), your County Superintendent of Schools, former teachers now serving in the Legislature or in other high-visibility jobs, all should be involved as frequently as possible. They will bring with them lustre, variety and authenticity. Now and then, they'll offer a challenge or two. Hand-in-hand, be prepared to make your own talents and expertness available to other educational groupings who seek the same involvements as you do.

EXTERNAL EMPHASIS

Reference was made to "selling the sizzle, not the steak" when presenting educational ideas and activities to the general public.

It may be difficult to believe (once one has prepared a really excellent paper on an important educational topic) that the public is not waiting

for every detail, each dot and comma. But it's true. The public is really interested in the Rams and 49ers, the Dodgers and the Giants, how to pay the taxes and if the fishing will be good next summer in the High Sierra. It's really quite natural, when one thinks about it.

So, for external publicity, select the most interesting highlights. Present this news candidly. Get it to the maximum audience available. Your public -- and the media -- will love you. And will understand what you're talking about, more than any of us might realize.

GETTING STARTED

Surprise your friends in the media. Once you've decided what your publicity program will add up to, and you've involved others and, hopefully, have won their enthusiasm, get appointments with publishers, editors and broadcasters. But, when you call, limit your visit to a brief explanation of what your plans are. Tell them you want to provide the best shots possible at important educational news within your jurisdiction. Don't offer them a story, or ask for space or time. Leave quickly. Then launch your program. The response at the media will make you happy. And astonish your School Board while making your educational fellows green with envy.

MEDIA LISTINGS

Before mailing even your first release, you'll want to make sure that your list of radio, TV and the print media is complete. The yellow pages of the telephone book and your own knowledge will help you put together a pretty good list. Then, take this to a friendly reporter or city desk and ask if you've forgotten anyone. You will have. But starting with your list, your newspaper contact will produce a card file complete with names, addresses and phone numbers that will result in a 100 percent accurate media mailing list. (It's hardly necessary to mention that you can send your newsletter to MORE than one person at the newspaper, such as publisher, city editor and school news reporter, but you can send only ONE news release -- this going to the city editor.)

RADIO TAPING

With your program off and running, the first releases issued and the newsletter zipping along, you now have a crack at one of the most overlooked publicity devices of all. That's remote radio taping of important news, including significant quotes from guest speakers and statements by yourself and staff. You'll need a tape machine that's compatible with local radio outlets. To save time, you'll want a

model that can transmit clearly over the telephone line. If you have a multi-media center, your own expert can help you. But there's such a variety of very good taping equipment available that the best shortcut is to sit down with your radio station news editor and find out what he favors. Rest assured that the cost won't be large. You are looking for three important factors: 1) Quality of transmission, 2) Simplicity of maintenance, battery-changing, etc., and 3) Reasonable cost. Your "remote radio taping service" may actually be your briefcase; the front seat of your car; your kitchen table, from which you can contact the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, a Congressman in Washington or a researcher at ACSA in Burlingame. The radio station, having helped advise you, will take special interest in getting this lively copy onto its next newscast. Remote taping is one of the "fun" things about publicity.

TV COVERAGE

There's not a great deal to memorize about providing TV facilities. The TV crew and newsman will tell you how they want to cover an event, anyway.

One thing not to be shocked at is the fact that a great deal of TV news is contrived news. A national political figure is shown in an "impromptu" interview and it looks good on the tube. But, chances are very good that he was advised as to the question that would be asked, he was told how many seconds he could talk and the newsman himself was briefed just as carefully. How this is all brought off to look spontaneous and "newsy" is part of the magic of the television business. Just go along with the program.

You can't go wrong if you keep in mind the fact that TV tends to dramatize everything the camera sees. It comes out bigger than life. A successful newscast depends on a highly graphic background. That's why shipyards, downtown streets, busy factory settings or beauty spots such as lakes and ocean fronts, are seen so often as backdrops for the interview. Your chances for TV coverage will be enhanced considerably if you dream up a dramatic setting. Example: A vocational education story featuring the auto body shop will attract immediate attention if the instructor and student are interviewed inside or alongside an antique auto, or something highly decorated and moving, when possible. TV just doesn't like a classroom interview. Rightfully so, perhaps.

THE NEWSLETTER

Trials, Techniques, Tribulations

An administrator wired his subordinate a lengthy list of instructions. Later, he said: "I'd have sent you a 10-word telegram, but I didn't have the time."

True.

The newsletter is the equivalent of a brief telegram. It's one of the most difficult things you'll every try to write. If you find a staff member with a knack for brevity and punch, protect him against problems at home, traffic mishaps and higher ambition.

A newsletter in the purest sense is news.

And, it's a letter.

Many, many newsletters-in-name-only are actually long diatribes or articles. Inevitably, they are failures.

A well-written newsletter reads so fast, so punchy and covers so much ground in so little space that it takes your breath away. It's the tip of the news iceberg -- hitting the high points, leaving the reader to delve further if he desires more detailed information. Yet each item is complete as to topic, import and source.

Best way to start a newsletter, or to revitalize an old one, is to pattern it after the best examples you can find.

One of the best-written, tightest-copy productions is the Kiplinger Washington Letter. It has practically no ornamentation, affecting only a distinctive paper color and logo stressing the letter "K." Another is Education U.S.A., published by the National School Public Relations Association (no connection with the National Education Association). Education U.S.A. covers an unbelievable amount of ground in each issue, is thoroughly researched and highly reliable. Either or both of these newsletters are worthwhile as examples of what YOUR newsletter should be. Note the lack of typographical display and art work; the use of "typewriter type." And note that if you wish to highly personalize your own newsletter, avoid use of the word "I" in the text, but end if with a "Cordially," and reproduce your own signature.

Make sure your newsletter is good enough that you wouldn't dream of sending it without an envelope which itself carries the logo used on the heading of the letter.

WORD POWER -- High Octane Stuff

The power of a single word can be amazing. And one word fuzzy or misunderstood can be disastrous. It's always good to have two or more knowledgeable persons review basic copy that is intended for general or specific target release.

The prudent administrator will wish to impress this from time to time on staff.

If anyone doubts the power of a single word, have him try this statement:

SHE TOLD ME THAT SHE LOVED ME

Then, starting in front of the word "She" and working forward, a word at a time, insert:

ONLY

As you progress through the sentence, ending with an "only" after "Me," you'll have eight distinct and separate meanings.

Word power is strong medicine.

STUDENT/CLASSROOM PR

About all one hears of some school districts, for meetings on end, are discussions of new buildings, building modifications, contracts, salaries and what have you. These are called "bricks and mortar meetings." Avoid any hint of bricks and mortar PR. School publicity should be student oriented -- about kindergarten pupils, or on up the scale to adult education. Learning's the thing. That's what the public is interested in. Student achievements and educational program advancements should form the heart of 99 percent of the PR thrust.

THE MECHANICS OF THE PRESS RELEASE

There is general agreement as to what a press release should contain. That's the five "W's" -- Who, What, Why, Where, When.

Fill in all or most of the facts answering those five W's and you have a news story.

But the format of the press release itself can pretty well suit yourself -- or your secretary.

Here's a sample of one that will work. However, change it as you will:

$8\frac{1}{2}$ x 11" paper. (White or grey seem to work best.)

Double or triple space.

Get to the point -- in the first paragraph, the first sentence.

Date

Your Organization
Street Address
City, State & Zip

For additional information,
please call:

Phone:

(text)

IF: The story is exclusive to one TV, radio or print media outlet or is prepared in response to a request from a single news organization, type in capital letters before starting the text of the press release:

EXCLUSIVE: To The News-Chronicle

IF: You are releasing the same story on the same day to both daily and weekly publications, rewrite the press release slightly (if only the opening paragraphs) for the weeklies. They are hypersensitive about being scooped.

IF: You are releasing both to the press and to the electronic media, tighten and shorten the press release sent to Radio and TV. Keep electronic sentences short. Type Radio-TV releases in all caps. News editors will recognize you as a pro.

IF: You're entertaining the notion of sending out mass press releases bulk mail, or without envelopes or with rubber stamped return address, DON'T.

AND: Never give a carbon copy of a press release to an editor, regardless of how well you know him. Use a clean, original copy, a mimeo copy or short run offset copy.

PUBLICITY COPY -- A TWO-HEADED COIN

There isn't a school district in the country that isn't alive with news copy -- either surfaced, or lying fallow. In addition, education abounds with fascinating professional developments on a continuing basis. Much of this comes from authoritative sources elsewhere. Capitalizing on its content and news value will lend authority and credibility to your public relations program. You can use this material internally for staff education and information. It often deserves general distribution to the public at large, when processed properly.

Example:

A recent Special Report published by ACSA was titled, REPORT ON THE ROLE OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL . It discussed in detail, with many specifics to satisfy both the specialists and the generalists, its efforts to identify and define the role of the Elementary School Principal and forecast what his function will be in the future.

An alert public relations program might well pick up this information and distribute intact to top staff people, all principals in the district and as addenda for the Board of Education.

Then, for internal newsletter distribution, the copy might read:

> BURLINGAME: A special committee of ACSA, dealing with administration at the elementary school level, has proposed that ACSA establish a joint task force to develop a statement on the role of the school principal. The job will

be difficult, the Committee on Elementary Administration warned. And it must cope with the growing need for more community-centered schools. It should recognize the advent of a new breed of school principal fully empowered to participate in district policy -- and implement it at the local, neighborhood level. Such new powers would entail developing within his staff a set of realistic community goals and objectives relative to the needs of that particular community plus local school autonomy in determination of curriculum, textbook selection, time allotments and methods of accountability. The committee findings have been forwarded to the ACSA Board of Directors for action. A copy of the report is now available at the District office or call Ext. 363 and one will be sent by dispatch, to your attention.

That pretty well wraps up the Special Report insofar as internal newsletter readership is concerned.

The same story, as prepared for general media release, could read:

The neighborhood school principal of tomorrow will spend less time telephoning downtown to find out what district policy is on any particular matter -- he'll be too busy, setting policy reflective of his school and its own special role within the local neighborhood community.

And tomorrow may be here sooner than you think.

Dr. John J. Jones, district superintendent, today published in the XYZ Newsletter, a report on Association of California School Administrators studies into the role of the neighborhood school, and the man who heads it up.

"I'm in agreement with the ACSA committee findings," Dr. Jones said. "In fact, XYZ District already is well on the way to implementing" etc., etc., etc. . . . .

For a brief radio release, the copy could start like this:

IT'LL SOON BE THE AGE OF AQUARIUS FOR THE LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL PRINCIPAL. IN THE FUTURE, HE'LL SPEND LESS TIME KEEPING TAB ON BOOKS, PENCILS AND OTHER BUREAUCRATIC DETAILS. HE'LL BE MAKING THE HARD DECISIONS AS TO WHAT IS TAUGHT, HOW IT'S TAUGHT AND WHEN IT'S TAUGHT IN HIS SCHOOL. DR. JOHN J. JONES, XYZ DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT, SALUTED THE IDEA . . . .

It seems awfully difficult, this writing of news copy. But here is one secret that has made excellent reporters out of humdrum newsmen. It's a fellow named Scotty Reston of the New York Times. Reston is probably the best "lead writer" of modern times. The examples contained in his news stories are better than any complex textbook. A Reston lead reverbalizes. It simplifies.

A sharp, compelling lead can be followed by dull and boring copy. But the lead will catch the editorial eye. And the story will see print -- or electronic exposure. Paste a few Reston leads in your District publicity notebooks. A magic formula.

THE NEWS STORY -- Putting First Things First

The term "inverted or pyramid style" is often used in discussing news writing technique. What this means is putting first things first; the "Five W's" -- Who, What, Why, Where and When -- are all laced into the opening paragraphs. There's a good reason for this. If you have the facts right at the top of your press release, the salient points of what you're saying manage to get on the air or into print despite the fact that the bottom of the story may get deleted due to time or space limitations. Hence the sense of the story isn't lost. (The term "inverted" probably stems from the fact that fiction pieces have their climax at the end -- to invert this means to put your punch in the opening of the story.)

A good example of the inverted style is contained in this lead paragraph from a United Press International wire story published by the San Jose News:

> Writers Guild Strikes;
>
> Year of Reruns Looms
>
> HOLLYWOOD (UPI) The Writers Guild of America West began picketing all major studios and producers today in a strike for more wages which threatens to paralyze television production and possibly force a year of reruns.

The same newspaper published this local story on education:

> Plans laid in the '60s for expansion of graduate education in California could produce an oversupply of trained graduates, with more advanced degrees than jobs requiring them, a report to the Legislature concludes.

That's the essence of the inverted style. Nothing really to it. There's a plus, too, for all those who analyze good news writing in the papers or tape and study TV and radio news shows -- you'll find the hard news style you adopt, with its insistence on facts and subject matter organization, is very helpful when giving speeches, writing annual reports and drawing up documentary materials.

Your best textbooks ALWAYS are examples taken directly from the media.

HEADLINE "SPICE" FOR YOUR NEWS RELEASE

You can dress up your press releases, and make them more appealing, by adding your own headline. The headline gives the meat of the story. It also helps the news room make a fast evaluation of what you have to say.

Let's use this book for laboratory purposes.

It's important that a current, do-it-yourself book on publicity has been distributed to thousands of school administrators in California. But how to interest the media in such a manner that stories about the book will appear throughout the state?

Our press release might read as follows:

> BURLINGAME:
>
> The Association of California School Administrators today published "The School Administrator's Publicity Handbook," a fast-moving volume designed to help superintendents and their staffs in 1,100 school districts improve communications between schools and public.
>
> Dr. William L. Cunningham, ACSA executive director, said the book deals "factually and practically" with an array of public relations problems besetting the school administrator of the mid-70's.

In its chapter on how to write an informative press release, the book advises administrators to pick up the local newspaper.

"Your best (news) textbooks always are examples taken direct from the media," the book advises.

We will, of course, add a bit more data, as to number of pages and total copies in the initial press run, and list some of the topics discussed. A good press release will result. We can hope the news editor will read down through paragraphs three and four, because that's the localized bait that will catch attention. So, we spice our piece and provide a road map with the addition of a headline at the top of the story. Our "grabber" might read:

> New ACSA Publicity Manual Says Local Media
>
> Is the Best Textbook

If interest begins at home, if the highest level of interest is self-interest, we can't miss catching the eye of thousands of news outlets. However grizzled your local media man may be, he'll find it difficult to toss aside a news release calling him the best textbook in town.

That's the purpose of a headline on your press release.

Try it.

Your local newsroom will like it!

SOME TECHNICALITIES

Your press releases should be written in third person. Even if your name is listed at the top of the release as the information source, write it:

J. C. Jones, superintendent of Blue Valley Unified School District, today said . . .

There was a hard and fast rule, in days gone by, that you should not send out a press release where a sentence at the bottom of the page continued over to the next page. This was because newspapers set type in "takes" -- the operator at one linotype might set pages one and two, and the operator at the next machine would set pages three, four and five. If page three began in the middle of a sentence, operator No. 2 couldn't very well begin without knowing just how the final line "broke" in the galley being set by operator No. 1.

Now there's an opposing point of view. Concerned that a press release where every page ends in a complete sentence runs the risk of a busy news room assuming that it has read the complete release, some public relations firms deliberately end pages in mid-sentence. That way, it's obvious there's more story on the next page.

A blizzard of press releases descends daily on the news media. With Xerox and other inexpensive (and handy) reproduction facilities, the paper blizzard is increasing. It's probably best that you guard against loss of the back pages of press releases by typing MORE in the lower right hand corner and/or by ending each page in mid-sentence or at least mid-paragraph.

When you reach the end of the story, center "THE END" at the bottom of the last page. Or write "-30-" or "###".

Media people may not appear on anyone's best-dressed or most-fastidious list, but they don't like handling messy carbon copies. Don't use carbons. Reproductions such as mimeo, offset or Xerox are ok.

Observe deadlines. A telephone call to all media outlets will get you the deadline times for each news show or print edition. Make a list. Get your copy in several hours prior to deadline. The newsroom will love you.

Be brief. An analysis of many school districts' PR programs would probably develop the fact that press releases are too long. Most of yours should be one-pagers. Seldom are more than two pages (about 500 words) necessary.

THE CARE & FEEDING OF MEDIA PEOPLE

If your public relations/communications program is to operate smoothly, you'll wish to have good relationships with the media. All of us have made mistakes in our efforts to woo and win the press. So, here's a list of things NOT to do if you wish to get along with reporters, broadcasters and anchor men:

1. Call newspaper reporters, editors and news room chiefs just to say hello. They'll get lonely if they fail to hear from you.

2. Expect all school news reporters to be knowledgeable as to every facet of education -- just as YOU are familiar with each detail of writing, editing, printing and distributing a newspaper.

3. When reporters seek you out, be difficult to find. This will convince the media that you're a busy guy.

4. When hot news breaks, demand a couple of days to prepare a position paper. This will add mystery and suspense to the story.

5. When a news reporter goofs, go over his head by calling his boss promptly. The reporter probably has put in for a raise and this will bring his name to his superior's attention.

6. NEVER credit a staff member for contributions to education -- after all, YOU are in charge of things.

7. In all written and spoken communications, toss in plenty of meaningful words like viable, in-depth, attitudinal, comprehensive, optimal and minimal, behavioral, workable and interface. When you verbalize with such nonspeak, you're bound to impress everyone except those who know the English language.

The list of slipups is endless. Actually, the ethics of your own profession aren't all that removed from journalistic ethics. Your conscience is an excellent guide.

Candor, frankness and objectivity will serve you well when dealing with the media.

It's good to remember that the veteran reporter has pretty well covered all the stories -- he's chanced across your particular item of news many times before under different names and in other places. He can spot the phony and the shallow.

No good news executive or reporter expects you to confess your soul. Or wants you to.

They do expect you to deal openly and fairly.

It's not to be debated that there's much inaccurate and shabby news reporting on TV, radio and in the press. But even America's presidents have failed to reform the media. So, don't try. Do your part and hope for the best.

There's a cardinal sin we fail to warn against. That's because it's futile exercise -- it's the maxim that NEVER should we ask a reporter to read his story before he prints it. Nothing turns off the newsman more quickly. But the temptation is so sweet and enticing that all of us, from time to time, make the "let me read it" suggestion. And get burned when we do it. Perhaps, someday, the reporters will learn to live with this. At the moment they seem to feel that such a suggestion implies that they are incapable of covering the story without the assistance of a blue pencil. They take umbrage.

THE ANTI-SCHOOL PRESS

If your professional bag of troubles and complexities includes a hostile press, beware.

Chances of converting such media are nil. But you can usually defuse them, or keep their impact at minimum level.

You'll wish to determine WHY the media is hostile.

1. If it's a case of a general attitude opposing all public education it should be ovious that you alone cannot change them. You can take special care that your press statements are carefully researched and documented. Always, be sure you know more about the subject than does the hostile media (they tend to bone up on one topic, then single it out and go after the local schools). You can request a fair hearing for your views. Do not engage in a running debate with the newspapers; do make a presentation of your program and/or your point of view. It's a truism that one never wins an argument with the press; always, they have the last word.

2. The hostility may be temporary, involving one program proposal or a specific decision by the school board. In this case, if you are well-informed, if you speak forth candidly, if you take your case to the public as graphically as possible, using the techniques outlined in the chapter, THE PRESS CONFERENCE, you may win the battle. At least, you won't lose the war -- for professional media people respect competence and eventually will give way to your request that your position be given a full airing.

It may be difficult to believe at times, but a substantial portion of the public stands resolutely behind the schools. This public often is silent. Its representatives aren't down at the school board meeting every other Tuesday. But any media that over-abuses the schools or fails to treat education fairly gets short shrift from this bloc. Here is fertile ground for the growth of supportive committees and citizen caucuses who can demand space in print and time on the air.

There's one resource that many in education are prone to forget -- youth power.

School districts exist only for the education of boys and girls. There is no other purpose, no other product involved. So, at all times, keep your public relations program child-centered and child-oriented. If it's a hot lunch program you're talking about, put the number of children involved right up in the lead of your story. The nuts and the bolts come later.

Hostile media can attack the school board. They can take special delight in attacking you. But they CANNOT attack the best educational interests of all the boys and girls of the community.

THE PRESS CONFERENCE

Press conferences, once called at a drop of a hat, are reserved these days for very special occasions. News department salaries have increased sharply and the cost of sending personnel to cover a press conference is something to reckon with. It is optimistic to expect that all press conferences will be well-attended. So, it's the wise administrator who staffs them with some captive personnel and a handy parent or two. A few people clicking cameras can't hurt, either.

The press conference can be full dress -- in an auditorium, for example. Or you can hold it in your office. Or on the sidewalk. Better yet, set up the press conference at the maximum point of impact -- a story about unsafe schools is especially effective when everyone assembles where you can dramatize the story by pushing over a wobbly wall or point out rickety interior fixtures first hand. If your story involves rats in a building, there's nothing quite like having a custodian trap a rodent or two.

This check list will be helpful in making sure that the press conference fulfills its mission:

Choose a site that's convenient to the media, and to you. A dramatic site, if possible.

The press conference MUST have a focal point -- a table or desk from which you operate and where all materials are assembled. (Don't wander around, don't show favoritism to any one segment of the media.)

Start on time.

Have telephones, paper and pencils at hand.

Supplement media coverage with your own cameraman.

Be sure the media gets written notification a couple of days in advance, followed up with a telephone call to the news room the afternoon prior to the press conference.

Make a few explanatory remarks at the outset of the press conference, then have the press releases and/or news kits distributed followed by a question-and-answer period that should be closed off as soon as the questions start to drag or repeat themselves.

Thank each reporter for attending. Promise to provide any additional materials the reporter may need.

It's always a good idea to ask your journalism department to assign a reporter and photographer. It's excellent experience for students, it helps dress up your show and it will really impress the media, many of whom believe today's young people can't read and write, anyway.

OFF, OR ON THE RECORD?

Some reporters will attempt to lead you into unplanned (or uncharted) waters during the question-and-answer sessions at press conferences or in telephone calls following the issuance of a press release. This can result in a situation where you are in competition with yourself -- your comments may top the quotes used in the official press release or obscure the facts that you so carefully presented in written format. So, go easy.

NEVER assume that any comments you make about a story YOU have released will be "off the record." You are fair game.

Chances are, if your original press release is complete and candid, there won't be a need to get into extensive discussions of the story at hand.

The news business operates like this: If a reporter is working on a story and comes to you for assistance, the names of other contacts or source materials, chances are he'll respect the privacy of the conversation and will keep your comments and helpful suggestions off the record.

If he comes out to question you about a story YOU generated, it's open season on any additional comments you may choose to make. In such cases, the idle comment of today can become the overpowering headline of tomorrow.

Discretion, to be certain, is the better part of valor.

THE PRESS KIT

A press kit is valuable because it permits you to distribute a lot of propaganda while being helpful to the media. The kit can be anything you wish it to be: It contains your basic news release. Some photographs. Background materials on the subject. Telephone numbers and addresses for follow-up purposes. Supporting materials Xerox'd from books, current magazine articles, government regulations or whatever. It's easy to make a press kit. A paper manuscript cover 11 x 17 overall, folded in the center to make a folder about 8½ x 11 will do. Or, get one of a larger size and fold the bottom edge into pockets - staple the ends. The loose papers will fit into the pocket on the right hand side (with the press release on top), and photographs, maps, etc., will go in the other (left hand) side.

If you can't come up with a snappy title for the cover, the name PRESS KIT will do nicely.

Enough kits should be made up to accommodate members of the school board and appropriate members of the administrative staff.

Few self-respecting media people ignore press kits. The PK is a valuable tool, indeed.

RUMOR MILL

Rumors and half-truths are best fed when in a vacuum -- a vacuum of no information or misinformation. The only way to quench such a fire, should it be fanned to life in your district, is with a liberal dosage of the facts.

You'll wish to:

Make sure all the facts are available.

Instruct switchboard and secretarial personnel to route incoming calls to one party who has the facts and who is instantly available to all callers.

Bring in any supportive agency that might help (see chapter, "When Crisis Comes, Participatory PR.")

Hold an informational press conference and/or issue an appropriate press release.

Consider installing a district hot line. Publicize this repetitively. Paid advertising notices with the hot line number in large numerals will be a big help in acquainting the community with this new service.

Beware of calls placed for purpose of "baiting" you. However, make sure that all incoming calls get through. When you cut the caller off you turn him off -- and feed the rumor mill.

NEWS IDEA SOURCES

You'll find at the back of this book a list of story ideas. If you wish to see many of these stories "in action," think of a school district or two with a good track record for getting into print. Enter a subscription to the papers in those localities and have your secretary clip them daily for possible story ideas.

Then stand by.

You'll be flooded with education clips, each containing the germ of an idea for local adoption.

It's a good idea to keep a notebook file of the best ones.

The New York Times can be a supplementary source for education stories -- it's usually months if not years ahead of other media.

PHOTO SUBMISSIONS

We live in a pictorial age. (Just as the cave man did.) Good photos have a welcome public and, hence, enjoy a cordial reception at the media. Check with the newspapers as to what size photo they prefer (chances are, they'll ask for 8 x 10 glossies).

You can go through all kinds of gyrations to make sure that your caption (explanation of the photograph) is in the proper format, tried and true.

It isn't necessary.

Include your name and address plus telephone number on a sheet of paper and in plain and simple language (remembering the five W's) state what the picture is all about. If the photo is appealing in terms of news value or human interest, it'll make it.

LETTERS-TO-THE-EDITOR -- More Punch for Your Program

One of the more effective publicity devices is the Letters-to-the-Editor column. Often, this avenue to communications is overlooked. Try it. You'll like it.

These four tips will prove helpful:

1. Be sure you have something to say.

2. Say it in a paragraph or two.

3. Avoid like the plague the "give-'em-hell" syndrome; be thoughtful, erudite, wise, polite -- even when blasting somebody.

4. Include your address and telephone and personally sign the letter.

You may wish to thank the newspaper, or an individual reporter, for coverage. Your letter will take on lustre and practically guarantee it will appear in print if you extend thanks for the news story AND mention a specific aspect involved:

> ". . . . I realize that the bond issue proposal was a complex matter, expecially that part of the program which involved the new construction schedule. So all of us especially appreciate the accuracy of the stories you published. As a result, the public had access to factual information . . . . ."

There isn't a day when the media isn't accused of goofing on news stories. Praise for accuracy never fails to ring the media bell.

You are one of a very few people qualified to pass judgment on such items as the completeness and accuracy of education news. When you take time to do so, you lift your letter out of the ordinary thank-yous that so many organizations send as a matter of reflex following each publicity campaign.

WHEN CRISIS COMES -- Participatory PR

Giant corporations, and those not so large, are discovering participatory promotion in their marketing programs. In educational public relations, pooling resources with another agency can pay special dividends in terms of credibility and total media exposure. This technique is especially helpful in times of crisis and confrontation.

The temptation during critical moments is to fire off a statement, or respond to a reporter's questions all by yourself. And that can be a lonely role.

A better approach often is to meet and confer with those representing the OPPOSITE side of the issue. If you can reach agreement that you are negotiating the problem on a positive basis and in mutual trust, or if the situation has been resolved to the satisfaction of both parties, ISSUE A JOINT STATEMENT. If necessary, call on the media together. Or, together, host a press conference.

Example: Criticism, just or unjust, may have been laid at your door because of black studies program content. There is a disruption of a Board of Education meeting. The usual shouting and shoving ensues. Later, pickets may arrive. Think it through carefully. You may wish to issue the most perfunctory of public statements, designed to calm the waters and fight for time. Meanwhile, if the NAACP is the opposite party interested, see if you can't work out ground rules for a resolution of the problem. Then, working together or separately, prepare a joint statement of intent for release to the media. Agree to stick by that statement -- both of you. Your Board of Education President may wish to join the NAACP representative or you yourself may be the proper party to affix your name to the media release. There are two rules to follow:

1. When you've reached agreement on what the statement is to contain, and have prepared wording that is mutually satisfactory, have BOTH parties initial the master press release.

2. The first 14 words of the press release should be as follows --

   In a joint statement today, the Blank Committee and the XYZ School Board said . . . .

Following the suggested wording above means that camp followers of both sides to the dispute will "get the message," and will ensure that the public understands as well. It's also clear enough that the busy city editor won't garble it in transmission, and attribute everything to you -- or to the other party.

REGIONAL ASSOCIATION PR

If you are involved with one of ACSA's important regional committees (there are 18 working professional committees in each ACSA region), you'll find this handbook a goldmine in making sure that communications flow internally, within the region, and externally, to the state ACSA. The handbook abounds with tips on how to process and channel vital professional information to the media, for public consumption.

Remember:

Within the regions you wish to:

1. Get the maximum number of your fellow administrators to participate actively.

2. Involve outside expertise whenever possible, to add zest and freshness to the program.

3. Set up meetings that hum with activity, no two having the exact same content and format.

4. Get the word out -- to other ACSA members in the region, to the state ACSA in Burlingame and its appropriate committees and, where the broad public interest is involved, to the mass media.

A good PR program is never complex. Simplicity and thoroughness count. When you have thoroughness, you have promptness. And being prompt means MAKING NEWS.

THREE PUBLICITY TOOLS

The three basic publicity tools are no more complicated than this:

1. NEWS -- or, what you know. Your expertness, authenticity, credibility.

2. CONTACTS -- or, WHO you know.

3. MECHANICS -- or, HOW you present WHAT to WHOM.

DELEGATE

Once the publicity program is formulated, guidelines established and staff support achieved, responsibility can be delegated. Monitoring the program will ensure adherence to the guidelines. Evaluation will result in enhancement of the program through improvements and refinements.

STORY IDEAS

for today's busy Administrator/Communicator

HISTORICAL

1. Milestones (individual school or district anniversary).

2. Photos that come to light illustrating the above or, better, a request for such graphic materials.

3. Length-of-service stories -- service anniversary of a teacher, janitor or parent-participant in school affairs.

RETIREMENT

1. Feature copy on changes in retirement system or methods.

2. Ceremonies involving retiring personnel.

3. Return-to-district stories featuring former school board members.

TECHNIQUES

1. Candid copy about new education programs.

2. New equipment and how it works.

3. Follow-up on earlier stories about new concepts and ideas in education -- did the procedure succeed or fail? Is it being expanded or cut back? Why?

VISITORS/CONTACTS

1. Advance on anticipated visits of distinguished guests.

2. Follow-up on above -- with photos.

3. Visits by foreign groups.

4. Unusual correspondence with authorities and schools abroad, or out of the district.

NEW RECORDS

1. Increase (or decline) in attendance.

2. Record signups for individual classes.

3. Advance stories providing demographic data predicting new records.

PROMOTIONS

1. Administrative

2. Certificated

3. Classified

USE OF FACILITIES

1. New or expanded usage of teaching equipment.

2. New additions to present equipment.

3. Data on usage of equipment -- total pupils, pupil hours and expansion as a result of summer month scheduling.

EMERGENCY NEWS

1. Follow-up news on fire or flooding. Wind damage and its impact.

2. Administrative plans to protect against or minimize future occurrence of above.

3. Offers of disaster assistance to other districts or communities on the part of board members, administration, teachers and students.

CONVENTION NEWS

1. Who's going and why.

2. Annual recap of convention participation with quotes from participants. How did district gain from dollars spent? How many among district personnel attended "on own time"?

3. Personal coverage of an important educational session or an interesting foreign tour by a district employee, written or taped, with photos pre-arranged with media as a feature series.

THE PRINTED PAGE

1. New books and catalogs in library or media center.

2. Ditto films, film strips and recordings and tapes.

3. Usage of same.

EDUCATION COSTS

1. Inflation's impact on district budget.

2. How district copes with inflation while protecting educational quality.

ADVANCEMENTS

1. Degrees and honors received by district personnel, with photos.

2. Speeches given, papers written.

QUOTATIONS

1. News release pegged on superintendent's newsletter, reporting to community what was published for staff.

ODD & UNUSUAL

1. Humorous happenings
2. Pet stories from the classroom
3. Unusual events taking place during the routine of a day's work

SPECIAL MEETINGS

1. Board of Education
2. Educational conferences

LETTERS-TO-EDITOR

1. Commending a news story
2. Correcting misstatements
3. Adding facts to a story already in print
4. Expressing gratitude to community or to a selfless individual

MANUFACTURED NEWS

(Also see "Quotations")

1. Surveys, predictions, concerns
2. News commenting on educational item originating elsewhere but of interest to local media. (Example: A development within ACSA which is of broad community interest.)

TIE-IN STORIES

1. News linking district with an event-in-the-news (such as school involvement in an environmental crisis).
2. Student participation in "City Government Day," a visit to the Legislature or local office of an elected official (to be worked out with other parties involved). (See Participatory PR.)

ADULT EDUCATION

1. Courses added, and why
2. Courses dropped, and why
3. Enrollment data
4. Oldest student; youngest student
5. Noteworthy achievement on the part of an adult student
6. Noteworthy achievement on the part of a teacher
7. Opinion survey's findings and what it means

SPECIAL EVENTS

1. Book fair
2. Public library "story hour" for preschool and elementary ages
3. Radio program started or in progress
4. TV features on education
5. Senior citizen participation events
6. Back-to-school programs for mothers and fathers
7. Same as above -- but for grandparents only, with recognition for eldest, longest resident, newest resident, most grandchildren
8. Teacher and student art exhibits
9. Vocational education specials
10. Tutoring service
11. Teacher-administrator "switch day" -- with newest teacher acting as superintendent, superintendent teaching first grade, etc., and school board members filling any unusual role
12. Scholarship news
13. Home visit program
14. School rummage sale, flea market, carnival night
15. Teacher talent shows with heavy photo coverage

16. Color slide/sound presentation on life of one educator during a total school day with visitations to business and civic groups. Preview of this for the press.

17. Little theatre production dramatizing history of area and its economy, people and schools

18. Identified "weeks" (such as "National Health," "Library," "Safety," etc., or, get mayor to proclaim a week of your own).

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